

October 2, 2013

Beware Shady Consultants

Question: *"Should I use a visa consultant to help me with my application? I was told I'll get my visa faster if I pay for professional help."*

Although the visa application process may seem daunting at first, with numerous forms to complete and various fees to pay, it is designed to be as straightforward and accessible as possible. All the forms are available for free, and can be accessed and completed by anyone with basic computing skills. If you are not comfortable using a computer, a close friend or family member who knows how to use a computer is a good person to ask for help.

The Embassy cautions applicants to take care before paying for professional assistance with a visa application. Many of the "visa consultants" and "immigration experts" advertising their services make false promises and charge exorbitant amounts to provide a very basic service. Most important to remember is that under no circumstances does paying for professional help expedite the application process. There is no "express service," and anyone claiming to possess inside knowledge on how to make the process move faster is not telling the truth.

A visitor's visa application requires the fewest forms and fees: the DS-160 application form and a one-time fee. While many applicants employ a travel agent to help them complete the application form -- at an additional cost -- the Embassy cautions that this is not strictly necessary, and may in fact prolong the application process. If the officer discovers that the travel agent did not in fact ask you every question on the form, for instance, you will be asked to complete a new form yourself and return to the Embassy at a later date. Moreover, if the officer discovers that information on your application form is misleading or incorrect, it may raise concerns about your credibility as an applicant. Whether you do complete your forms yourself or rely on a travel agent, it is of the utmost importance that you verify that all the information reported on your application is complete and correct: you are personally responsible for your application.

Immigrant visas require more forms and paperwork, but the necessary documents are still available for free online. U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents who are filing petitions for family members file form I-130. Once the I-130 petition is approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, it is forwarded to the National Visa Center (NVC). U.S. petitioners then file the required Affidavit of Support form (either form I-864, form I-864EZ, or form I-864W). There are detailed instructions available on the website www.travel.state.gov for petitioners who are unsure which Affidavit of Support form to use. Note that for family preference categories, NVC will contact the petitioner when the case's priority date is about to become current; it is at that time that the petitioner will file the Affidavit of Support form.

Whether you are applying for a visitor's visa or an immigrant visa, be wary of organizations that require payment for immigration and visa services. Some of these organizations may be fraudulent entities seeking to elicit payment for information or forms that are available free of charge on U.S. government websites. Official U.S. government websites end in ".gov."

Information on websites with other suffixes (".net," ".com," or ".biz," for example) should be viewed with suspicion. Comprehensive information on visas and immigration, as well as all necessary forms, is available on official U.S. government websites, including www.travel.state.gov and www.uscis.gov.

For more information, please visit our website, <http://kingston.usembassy.gov/> and the Department of State's travel website, <http://travel.state.gov>.